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ABSTRACT

Documented sex differences in speech and their significance are considered. The research literature on sex-differentiated speech reveals the influence of sex-role stereotypes and assumptions about the relation of speech to sex-differentiated socialization. The more substantiated differences form three clusters: (1) the production of esteemed variants, (2) the degree of dynamism in pitch and intonation, and (3) conversational dominance. The best documented is the claim that women are more likely to produce the socially-esteemed pronunciation and syntax. In addition, both pitch and intonation appear to distinguish male/female speech. Differentiation in conversational dominance is produced by overlap, interruption, verbosity, and the ability to introduce topics that are sustained by others. It has been assumed that differentiated socialization produced differentiated behavior, that speech differentiation was naturally a part of this process, and that utterances and behaviors were likely to be mutually consistent. By stressing the purposeful, intentional dimension of naturally occurring utterances, the three clusters of substantiated differences may be treated as accomplishing certain ends. It is suggested that each of these clusters pertains to the tenor of discourse, and that they collectively show the attempt to define interaction, capture an audience, and affirm relations of dominance. (Author/SW)

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THE NATURE AND POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCE OF A "FEMALE REGISTER"

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THE NATURE AND POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCE OF A "FEMALE REGISTER"

ABSTRACT

A review of the research on sex-differentiated speech reveals the strong imprint of popular stereotypes, problematic assumptions about the relation of speech to sex-differentiated socialization, and an emphasis on sex-differentiation in speech as "revelatory." Three distinct clusters, or axes, of differences are substantiated: (1) in the production of esteemed variants, (2) in the degree of dynamism in pitch and intonation, and (3) in conversational dominance. Stressing the purposeful, intentional dimension of naturally occurring utterances, these differences may be treated as "accomplishing" certain ends. It is suggested that each of these clusters pertains to the tenor of discourse, and that they collectively evince the attempt to define interaction, capture an audience, and affirm relations of dominance. (Sex-differentiated speech, female register, gender.)

The most recent flurry of interest in the relative status of the sexes has yielded a sizeable body of research devoted to the study of language behavior. That research has tended in two directions: either it focuses on sexism in language, i.e., in the talk about women, or it focuses on the identification of sex differentiation in language use, i.e., in the talk produced by women. Of the two areas, work on the sex differentiation of language, i.e., sex-differentiated speech, has had a comparatively bleak history. If the success of the field were measured by the discovery of sex differentiation in the use of American English[1], we might be tempted to conclude that here we have the expenditure of much energy for little "reward." Witness remarks from some of those prominent in the field: "What is notable is how few expected sex differences have been firmly substantiated by empirical studies of actual speech" (Kramer, Thorne, and Henley, 1978:640). "One indictment of this research area /i.e., sex-differentiated language/ is that so many of the hypothesized differences that have been tested have not been found" (Spender, 1980:32).

Certainly, there is every reason to anticipate the operation of some degree of sex differentiation in American English. Though there is little to argue for the sex-exclusiveness of any language, a case can be made for sex-preferential differentiation, i.e., that certain patterns, intelligible and accessible to all members of a culture, would be used more frequently by and heard as more appropriate for members of one sex (Bodine, 1975). These patterns, while relatively more prevalent among one sex, would nonetheless be socially distributed: spoken by "some of the women all of the time, all of the women some of the time, most of the women most of the time" (Bodine,

1975:133) and some men some or all of the time. Thus, although a "women's language" as it implies sex-exclusiveness is unlikely, a "female register" (Crosby and Nyquist, 1977) or "style" (Lakoff, 1979) is tenable[2]. Yet even this delimited notion has not met expectations. Should we conclude that, at least among speakers of American English, there is little interaction between sex and language, or are the few differences which have been substantiated nonetheless important? In short, is the glass half-full or half-empty? The aim here is to address this metaphor: what are the documented sex differences in speech and what might be their significance?

THE FINDINGS TO DATE

The Influence of Sex-Role Stereotypes. There are numerous common-sense expectations, or "folk-linguistics" (Kramer, 1974), about the ways in which women and men's speech differ. In the last decade's research many of these -- for example, the expectation that women use more trivializing particles (e.g., "oh dear"), intensifiers (e.g., "so," "such"), reduplicated forms (e.g., "teeny-tiny"), modals (e.g., could, shall, might), and attenuated imperatives[3] -- have either been dismissed as methodologically biased by an inherent sexism[4] or have failed to garner empirical support. A few of these expectations -- specifically that in mixed-sex interactions women interrupt more and are more verbose -- as we shall see have been directly refuted. Yet despite a lack of support for the bulk of such conceptions, they have continued to bear on the search for a sex-differentiated register. While inevitably, common-sense expectations shaped the field's initial paradigm

statements, i.e., the work of Key (1974) and Lakoff (1975), these notions continue to be the subject of empirical research[5] and to be incorporated, albeit refuted, in reviews of the literature[6]. Thus, the topic of sex-differentiated speech is notable for the degree to which it has been responsive to and inadvertently directed by common sense and largely insupportable notions -- specifically sex-role stereotypes.

A comparison of the prevalent folk-language assumptions and the hypotheses put forward in the literature reveals a correspondence which speaks to this point. Kramer's (1977; 157) survey revealed female speakers popularly characterized as exhibiting correct grammar and enunciation, high and variable pitch, verbosity, concern for listener, and high expressiveness (as evidenced by gestures, expression of emotion, and self-revelation). Male speakers were characterized in part by their deep voices, use of slang and swear words, and conversational dominance. What are the dominant expectations among scholars in the field? That male and female speech is distinguished by pitch and pitch variability, preference for esteemed forms in pronunciation and grammar, and conversational dominance. Such a juxtaposing does not address the adequacy of either research or common sense, it does however suggest that stereotypic expectations are mediating apprehension of the phenomenon to a degree which is at present incalculable, perhaps diverting attention from the phenomenon in its own right.

More immediately relevant to the discussion pursued here, is that this mediation of stereotypes encourages the confounding of what is confirmed about

sex-differentiated talk with what we only suspect to be the case by virtue of the stereotypes or in reaction to them. Attempts to grasp the nature of differences may be thwarted by an even-handed attention to what is substantiated and what is, at best, untested hypothesis. One persistent example of this, noted earlier, is the tag question formulation. Though apparently lacking empiricaly confirmation, it has receivied considerable notice -- most probably because of its implication of an uncertainty in women's speech. As a consequence, that coherence which might be seen to exist among those empirically verified speech differences is muddled by the implications of a still hypothetical formulation. In this field, questionable hypotheses and their ramifications have been allowed to mold apprehension of extant findings. What follows is an attempt to summarize and evaluate these findings, yet escape the traps.

The More Substantiated Differences. To date, best documented is the claim that women are more likely to produce the socially esteemed pronunciation and syntax[7]. "Where there are phonological variants, women, compared with men of the same social class, age, and level of education, more often than not choose the form closer to the prestige, or 'correct' way of talking" (Kramer, et al, 1978:639). This also appears to be the case cross-culturally (Thorne and Henley, 1975; Philips, 1980).

Not only is women's talk likely to be more correct, but it appears that men's is characterized by a positive preference for non-standard forms. Reviewing Trudgill's (1975) work, Thorne and Henley conclude:

> On the one hand males expressed the greater value attached to more correct forms . . . but on the other hand, they indicated in various ways that they were favorably disposed to nonstandard speech . . . . Male working-class forms seem to symbolize masculinity, for men of other social classes as well (1975:18).

In the realm of paralanguage, i.e., the non-linguistic "how" of speech, both pitch and intonation appear to distinguish male/female speech. Regarding pitch, "women's speech exhibits faster and more frequent pitch shifts, more change in amplitude or loudness, and a greater pitch range" (Philips, 1980:527) -- factors McConnell-Ginet (1978) has symmarized as "dynamism." Even more than pitch, however, intonation patterns appear to distinguish between male/female speech (McConnell-Ginet, 1978; Brend, 1975). As in the production of the esteemed (or "correct") variants, again we find evidence of a positive suppression by men of the pitch and intonation patterns characteristic of women's speech, that is, differences in pitch and the pitch of certain intonation patterns appear to be greater than might be accounted for by anatomical structure alone (Spender, 1980; McConnell-Ginet, 1978; Brend, 1975; Sachs, 1973, 1975).

In interaction, while men and women interrupt at similar rates in same-sex dyads (Octigan and Niederman, 1979), in mixed-sex dyads these rates increase, men are more likely to interrupt and overlap women's speech than the converse, and women are more likely to attempt retrieval of interrupted communication than are men (Octigan and Niederman, 1979; Zimmerman and West, 1975, 1978). Female verbosity also appears to decrease in mixed-sex interactions (Aries, 1976).

Aries (1976) concludes from her observation of same- and mixed-sex task oriented[8] groups that

> the /all/ male groups /established/ a more stable dominance order over time than the female groups. In the male groups, the same males were the most active speakers in every session, and never missed sessions.
>
> In the female groups, on the other hand, there was a greater flexibility in the rank order of speaking over time . . . . The active speakers said they felt uncomfortable in the leadership positions, felt they were taking up too much time in the group, and in some sessions they drew out more silent members, and assumed lower ranks (1976:10).

Further, the substance of talk appeared to differ between groups, particularly in regard to "information about themselves, their feelings, their homes, and their relationships with family, friends, and lovers" (Aries, 1976:12), and in the expected directions. In mixed-sex groups, males displayed a more "personal orientation," women did not display a parallel increase in talk addressed to male concerns -- issues to which we will return at a later point.

Fishman's (1978) ground breaking work shows men to be more successful in having topics which they introduce develop into conversations, with women performing the work which sustains those conversations through their use of questions and encouraging sub-vocalizations. Women do not meet the same success in pursuing topics they have introduced; they are more likely to be greeted by a conversation-stopping "um hmmm," or silence from their male interlocutor.

There are, then, three distinct clusters, or axes, of substantiated speech differences: (1) in the production of esteemed variants, from an affinity for those variants to an avoidance of them, (2) in the degree of

dynamism in pitch and intonation, and (3) in conversational dominance as it is produced by overlap, interruption, verbosity, and the ability to introduce topics which are sustained by others. These clusters are important not only by virtue of their persistent confirmation, but also because that persistence of occurrence implies their co-occurrence[9]. Women's speech is not only likely to be "correct," or dynamic, or supportive of other interactants, it is likely to display all of these features simultaneously. As has been frequently noted (e.g., by Thorne and Henley, 1975; Crosby and Nyquist, 1977), it is the co-occurrence of features, rather than any single factor, which is likely to bear social significance. What, then, is posited about the social significance of such a female register?

Prevailing Interpretations. The work on sex-differentiated speech, although disparate on numerous counts[10] is unified by the application of two distinct and somewhat limiting sets of axioms -- one set, assumptions about the process of socialization, the other meta-theoretical assumptions about the social significance of utterances. Together, these assumptions have affected the interpretation of findings, encouraging the reduction of talk to an expression of status.

Regarding the first set, investigations of sex-differentiated speech have tended to presume the following:

> (1) If one could find differential socialization by sex, some portion of that socialization must encompass "the teaching of special linguistic uses to little girls" (Lakoff, 1975:5).

(2) If sex-differentiated behavior could be observed, attributable to that differential socialization, sex-differentiated speech must also be extant.

(3) A sex-differentiated language "should be consonant in style with other behaviors expected from the occupants of a particular status and reflective of cultural values prescribed for that status" (Warshay, 1972:3). Not only should talk be sex-differentiated like other behaviors, but it should be congruent with those other behaviors. For example, girls socialized to be passive or dependent should reveal those qualities in their speech.

In sum, it has been assumed that differentiated socialization produced differentiated behavior, that speech differentiation was naturally a part of this process, and that utterances and behaviors were likely to be mutually consistent.

Over the years, this linkage of assumptions has proven to be a house of cards. First, the degree of sex-differentiation in behavior is itself problematic. Maccoby and Jacklin's (1974) review of the data on sex differences in "motivation, social behavior, and intellectual ability" reveals only a few areas in which sex differences have been substantiated -- verbal, visual-spatial, and mathematical abilities -- and within these the degree of difference appears to vary with age. Secondly, socialization encompasses a very complex set of practices, the effect of which vary, even on the simplest level, in terms of consistency within and between socialization agents, the relationship between agents of socialization and the children toward whom these messages are directed, and children's disposition toward and understanding of those messages (Safilios-Rothschild, 1979). That

certain sex differences in behavior can be confirmed does not argue that socialization is invariably or directly reproduced in behavior. A confusion common among those pursuing the general investigation of sex differentiation -- specifically a failure to distinguish between prescribed behavior, behavior as as it is perceived, and actual behavior -- has been reproduced in the literature on speech differentiation.

The second set of assumptions, though not of questionable validity, entails a consequential choice about the theoretical import of utterances. Philips succinctly phrases the premise in her definition of sociolinguistics[11]: "sociolinguistics is the study of the ways in which a person's speech conveys social information" (Philips, 1980:523). Disregarding its definitional aspect, this is the premise central to, and consistent throughout, the investigations of sex-differentiated speech: that is, that speech is appropriately treated as "revelatory," most often of status[12].

That premise is amply evidenced in the explanations which are offered for the clusters of substantiated differences discussed earlier. Trudgill's (1975)assessment of the significance of the production of the esteemed variant has been echoed throughout more recent work: women, aware of their subordinate status and unable to offset it by invocation of occupational prestige, "expend more articulatory effort: perhaps as number two 'we try harder'" (McConnell-Ginet, 1978:545). Thus, production of the esteemed variant is presumed revelatory of status. Similarly, intonational dynamism is understood as marking gender (Philips, 1980; McConnell-Ginet, 1978) both because of the consistency with which intonation distinguishes American male/female speech[13],

and because such paralinguistic cues may override linguistic messages. In this case, speech is understood as revelatory of role: the achieved and situated production of femininity or masculinity. Most obviously, conversational dominance can be understood as revealing sex stratification as well as patterns of socialization, situated norms of interaction, and role.

Treating talk as cue to the social location of persons is an established approach among those attending to the interaction of language and society. The roots of such an approach are generally within the study of linguistics (Giglioli, 1972), and linguists whose work has exemplified such an approach have had a significant impact on the study of sex-differentiated speech (e.g., Lakoff, Key, McConnell-Ginet). There is, however, a second theoretical stream in the study of naturally occurring utterances:

> The first /stream/ may be considered as a part of general linguistics. It consists in the study of the influence of social factors . . . on language structures . . . . The second research direction . . . /may be characterized as/ the analysis of the social role of language (Giglioli, 1972:8-9)[14].

In part, the latter approach conceives language as more-or-less consciously tailored by actors to their purposes-at-hand and assessment of existent social context. The emphasis here is on the multiple referent, i.e., indexical, quality of language (Bar-Hillel, 1954; Garfinkel and Sacks, 1970). Because any intent may be phrased by any variety of linguistic or non-linguistic behaviors, because any utterance may be interpreted as symbolizing a variety of intentions, intersubjective understanding requires "work," is an "accomplishment," and in particular is managed by reference to social context (Moerman, 1968;

Garfinkel, 1967; Kjolseth, 1972; Mehan and Wood, 1975). From this perspective utterances may well be indicators of relative status, or situated norms, or socialization patterns, but they are also more-or-less intentional performances authored by those who may be inferred to have some purpose and who are relatively cognizant of social context and its ramifications. "When women or men speak, they intend to do certain things, such as create rapport or assert control" (Kramer, et al, 1978).

While speech may legitimately be treated as revelatory of status, when that approach is applied to a female register -- or indeed to the language of any identifiably subordinate group -- it joins a pre-existent tendency to interpret the behavior of the subordinate group as merely reactive to a dominant group/culture. The active and creative potential of utterances fades and the reactive, status-proscribed aspect of speech rises to the fore. Indeed, the inclination to reduce utterances to a reflection of social location appears directly tied to the status of the group under scrutiny: few have pursued the notion of a "male register." While a female register may exist by virtue of the shared status of women, that common status also yields characteristic ways of "doing" certain things, i.e., a female register reflects status but also encompasses occasioned, intentional activity.

There is also a risk of tautology common to the assumptions about the relationship of socialization to speech and the treatment of speech as revelatory of status, although that risk may be unavoidable. Certainly, "language is worth what those who speak it are worth" (Bourdieu, 1977:652): the material

status of the speaker shapes the utterance as well as how that utterance is heard. In the case of sex-differentiated speech, it may be argued that women's status adheres most tenaciously. Spender (1980) argues well for a "sexist semantic rule," i.e., that the sex of the speaker determines the worth of the words.

> I think the determining factor is more often the sex of the speaker rather than the speech, so that when females use perhaps or maybe /for example/ it is interpreted as a qualifier: when males use the same terms the interpretation is that they are using absolutes (Spender, 1980:34-35).

Because women's speech in particular is likely to be heard in light of their sex/status, the treatment of a female register as revelatory of that status amplifies the possibility of circularity, i.e., speech both heard in terms of status and interpreted as a comment on status.

SUGGESTIONS ABOUT THE SIGNIFICANCE OF A "FEMALE REGISTER"

With a stress on the active and intentional aspect of naturally occurring language, what might be said about a gender differentiated register? After all, the term "register" has been deliberately chosen: "one's dialect shows who (or what) you are, whilst one's register shows what you are doing" (Hudson, 1980: 49). Female or male registers are by definition situated, more-or-less intentional accomplishments. What is the social significance of these productions of esteemed variants, or in the degree of dynamism in pitch or intonation, or in conversational dominance? While the source of such difference is relatively apparent, what might be suggested about the social impact or social role of those differences? What do people "do" with such registers? What follows is intended as suggestion: an exhaustive mining of this area would be outside the scope of this discussion as well as premature.

The Tenor of Discourse. Pitch and intonation -- because they are examples of paralanguage which may overpower other linguistic messages, because of their achieved quality, and because of the persistence of sex-differences in this realm -- have especially captured the attention of those concerned with sex-differentiated language. Yet pitch, intonation, or paralinguistic cues in general are simply one aspect of the more encompassing notion of the "tenor" of discourse. It is the tenor of discourse, as distinct from ideational contact, that expresses the nature of the relationship between interactants, as well as creates that relationship. "We know, for instance, that language is often used not to talk about objects or ideas 'out there' but rather to convey information about the relationship existing between the two people conversing" (Gregory and Carroll, 1978:48)[15].

To a degree which is striking, the three clusters of substantiated differences are uniformly encompassed by the notion of tenor: pronunciation, intonation, and the structuring of conversations all convey information about the relationship between interactants, and may as well be used to create particular relations. The most substantiated sex differences in speech appear to be be those which express the quality of interaction[16]. The impact of tenor on other facets of discourse must be significant, although it can only be suggested at this point:

> Although it is convenient to separate field /ideational component/, mode /form of discourse/ and tenor, it must be remembered that the selection of options in one category may influence the selection of options in another. Contextual features do not merely coincide, they determine one another (Gregory and Carroll, 1978:67).

Do these forms also convey gender? Because they appear so consistently to distinguish between the sexes and because they involve men's active avoidance of certain "female" forms, that might be tentatively concluded. While the logic of the contention that what distinguishes the sexes also marks gender is problematic, Kramer's (1977) survey does show women characterized as using "good grammar" while men "use slang"; women display "high pitch" while men have "deep voices"; and women are thought to show "concern for listener" while men use "dominating, boastful, and demanding speech." Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that these three substantiated clusters do indeed mark gender.

Perhaps more important than whether gender is conveyed, are the consequences which are likely to follow from the occurrence or co-occurrence of these forms. Differences in tenor may well argue for competing definitions of interactions -- after all to some degree these differences are the product of "work," they are achieved, and their achievement affirms the asymetric quality of mixed-sex interactions. Thus, correct, dynamic speech meets less correct, more controlled utterances. Both proffer a definition of interaction -- albeit one which interacts with the field, mode, setting, and relative status of interlocutors -- in which the implications of tenor are substantively different. Indeed, the inferences drawn from tenor may have significant consequences: women are heard as emotional because "our everday 'tunes' -- the patterns we use in ordinary circumstances where no extremes of emotion are felt or expressed -- show a degree of dynamism found in men's tunes only in extraordinary circumstances of heightened emotional expression" (McConnell-Ginet, 1978:552).

These differences in tenor may well coincide with what feminists have described as women's need to "tell it slant" (Olsen, 1978), i.e., women's conviction that they must shape their speech so that it is attended to by men. Whether such active shaping has produced the differences we have noted, or would attenuate them, raises an intriguing question outside the scope of this discussion. It also introduces the question of how audience affects the production of sex-differentiated speech.

Commanding an Audience. One of the most intriguing features of sex-differentiated language is the degree to which utterances are responsive to the sex of the addressee, although such a variable has only recently been addressed and does not clearly materialize in the expected direction. For example, Brouwer, Gerritsen, and De Haan (1979) looked for sex differences in the language used to purchase a train ticket[17]. They found few such differences, but instead discovered that the sex of the ticket-taker had significant impact[18].

> Our results pointed out that the addressee was an important factor in determining the number of words used, the use of diminutives, civilities and hesitations. . . . All of the kinds of utterances that women are characteristically supposed to use more often than men -- utterances indicating insecurity and politeness -- were used more often by both women and men when speaking to the male ticket seller (Brouwer, et al, 1979:47). Emphasis in the original.

Although the discussion here has not suggested the same language differences, the relevance of the point made by Brouwer, et al, is unhampered.

Aries (1976) observations of group interaction address a similar question regarding audience, although once again findings (and in this case, also methods) do not coincide with the conclusions put forward here.

> We may conclude that the presence of women changes the all-male style of interacting, causing males to develop a more personal orientation, with increased one-to-one interaction, greater self-revelation, and a decrease in the aggressive, competitive aspects of the encounter.
>
> For females, the difference in interaction style . . . is less dramatic. /Results show/ a decrease in discussion by women in the mixed groups of home and family . . . . The presence of men causes women to speak less . . . .
>
> . . . for both males and females in the mixed groups there was greater use of emphatic, exaggerated words, and more doubtful, uncertain words . . . . There were also more frequent uses of qualifications . . . in the mixed groups . . . . (Aries, 1976:14-15).

Much can be inferred from Aries and Brouwer, et al, but the paucity of research on the influence of sex of addressee limits this discussion to the realm of suggestion. Perhaps the female register displays a "functional tenor," i.e., perhaps it stands as claim to a particular functional relation of interactants. From Aries and Brouwer, et al, we might infer that a female register is used to capture attention:"Competence is also the capacity to command a listener" (Bourdieu, 1977:648). Substituting the findings which this discussion has found supportable, perhaps the selection of the esteemed variant or of a dynamic intonation pattern works toward commanding an audience.

Brouwer,et al, is suggestive of more specific coordinates: perhaps the female register is used when attempting to capture the attention of one with a situationally determined "compound" status advantage, as might be found for example with a male, but not female, ticket taker. However, such a possibility would not apply to the topic of conversational dominance -- a cluster which merits special attention.

The Double-edged Issue of Conversational Dominance. Some degree of reciprocity is required in those conversational strategies which produce dominance as it is measured by topic or verbosity: one party must ask the questions, nod encouragement, and refrain from lengthly utterances. The other party must allow all that to happen. More than any of the other sex-differentiated features, conversational dominance is an interactive accomplishment. But what is being accomplished by conversational dominance, what is being "done"?

Certainly, conversational dominance has something to do with power, but its nature and direction of flow is problematic. On the one hand, strategies that allow the other to talk and determine topic relinquish attention and whatever power, status, or self-enhancement might be thought to adhere to attention per se. This is the conclusion most frequently drawn from the study of mixed-sex conversations.

However, in that same body of literature (e.g., in Fishman, 1978; Densmore, n.d.) silences are often treated as enhancing of power. For example,

> The behavior of remaining 'aloof' while 'someone else discloses, facilitates dominance' (Jenkins and Kramer, 1978:80) and it is therefore possible that it is the desire to be dominant (which is not quite the same as socialized behaviour) which leads to the supposed male difficulty in dealing with the personal (Spender, 1980:47).

Clearly, Spender's point applies, i.e., that the sex of speaker bears significantly on whether conversational dominance is heard as self-enhancing or self-denigrating, but Johnson's (1976) exploration of the stereotypes about women's power suggests another interpretation. In specific, Johnson contends that women rely upon, and are characterized as using, indirect power based on personal resources: "indirect" because "the influencer acts as if the person on the receiving end is not aware of the influencer" (Johnson, 1976:100), "personal" because

> There are two types of resources one can possess: those which depend on a personal relationship, such as liking or approval; and those which are independent of relationships, the concrete resources . . . . personal resources such as liking, love, affection, and approval . . . limits the user to those areas of influence that are highly dependent on others (Johnson, 1976:101-2).

Because women generally lack the material resources which are basic to the exercise of direct power and because they are likely to conceive negative consequences to their exercise of direct power, they are left with the least noticeable (Johnson, 1976) and most sociable forms -- indirect and personal formulations.

While the encouragement of another's conversational dominance might

be a product of reliance on indirect and personal power, what might it accomplish? Drawing from the cross-cultural investigation of political language perhaps conversational dominance "accomplishes" the affirmation of subordinate status:

> . . . it is clear from these papers that public political discourse has a different flavor in those communities where the maintenance of individual autonomy is a concern than it has in those where relations of dominance/subordination are crucial.
>
> Where who can speak is the primary concern, political discourse may better be analyzed as the reproduction of dominance rather than the exercise of 'power' (Myers and Brenneis, 1982:4).

Although these are conclusions drawn from an apparently different register, that of political discourse, insofar as political discourse attends to the creation and reproduction of power and dominance, perhaps it is not so far removed from the register which announces sex/gender.

CONCLUSIONS

As research progresses, the subject of sex-differentiation in speech may well be revealed as more wide-ranging and intricate than what has been concluded here. Until that time, however, theories about the nature and consequence of a sex-differentiated register must be restricted to the substantiated findings. Because the topic of sex differentiation, whether in speech or general behavior, is so fraught with stereotypes students of the subject must exercise an additional level of caution in their formulation of theories and hypotheses.

As it stands, the degree of substantiated sex difference in naturally occurring utterances is rather limited. Initially the question was whether these differences were few-but-significant or few-and-insignificant, i.e., whether the glass was half-full or half-empty. Implicit in this question is the issue of the degree to which behaviors are polarized by sex, and the degree to which language use parallels such differences.

What has been suggested here is an alternative, and perhaps less reductive, question. To extend the metaphor dangerously, it is not so much whether the the glass is partly-filled or partly-empty, but that it would be fruitful to pick a different glass altogether. What has captured attention is the degree of difference between female and male speech -- in particular whether speech reflects what we know or believe to be the case about sex-differentiated status. What calls for attention is the significance of those actual differences in language use -- in particular what are people doing/accomplishing when they produce these registers? This discussion has offered suggestions toward answering that question.

FOOTNOTES

1. This discussion is directed exclusively to the production of sex-differentiation among the speakers of American English. Ironically, interest in the subject has been quite high among American scholars, yet the speakers of English demonstrate a very low level of sex-differentiated speech.

2. It must be stressed that what is posited is a register, not a dialect, i.e., that these are setting-specific rather than person-specific differences.

3. These specific expectations were first articulated by Key (1974) and Lakoff (1975).

4. In that (1) assumptions about males' speech are treated as normative and (2) that similar words voiced by males would not be similarly classed as, for example, intensifiers or qualifiers (Spender, 1980).

5. For example, Dubois and Crouch (1975) substantively undermined both Lakoff's (1975) suggestion that women were more likely to employ a "tag question" formulation, e.g., "John is here, isn't he?", and her notion that that form conveyed uncertainty. Yet neither issue has been put to rest. Philips (1980:533) notes that the hypothesis of the tag question formulation still merits consideration both because "the empirical studies of tag questions do not involve very large amounts of data, and have not been particularly sophisticated in either research methodology or interpretation of the data" and because "there is cross-cultural and cross-linguistic evidence for the expression of greater politeness and deference by women through devices quite similar to tag questions . . . ."

6. For example, in Spender (1980), Philips (1980), and Kramer, et al (1978).

7. This conclusion has been questioned by Nichols (1976) and Labov (1978). However, Philip's rephrasing of the Labov argument lends support to the claim for women's production of the esteemed variant: "Labov . . . suggests that women are more sensitive to norms for prestige, but to different norms in different circumstances. The greater use of <u>new</u> variants by women reflects sensitivity to new local standards of prestige . . . . The greater use of standard variants reflects greater sensitivity to national prestige norms for speech" (Philips, 1980:537).

8. "Task" in this case was members getting to know one another.

9. Although as Philips (1980) notes, co-occurrence <u>per se</u> has yet to be empirically demonstrated.

10. "Analysis, findings, and commentaries on the sexual differentiation of language have come from linguists, lexicographers, speech physiologists, anthropologists, psychologists, sociologists, novelists; people in speech communication, English literature, literary criticism, education; and feminists writing for women's liberation publications" (Thorne and Henley, 1975:7). This diversity has resulted in the application of a variety of research methods, to variously defined units of analysis, drawn from data of systematic or anecdotal collection, and thus of problematic comparability.

11. This is an early and deliberately narrowed definition. Later Philips broadens it to include "how social realities are constructed and conveyed through communicative behavior" (Philips, 1980:524).

12. Indeed, a similar assumption pervades the literature on sexist language, that is, that language behavior is revelatory of attitude.

13. Moreso than pitch (McConnell-Ginet, 1978:549)

14. These two approaches are generally used to distinguish sociolinguistics from the sociology of language. However, the sociolinguistics/sociology of language distinction also encompasses the treatment of language as revelatory of status as opposed to the treatment of language as active manipulation of a symbol system.

15. Gregory and Carroll distinguish between personal and functional tenor. The former indicates the relationship between interactants and varies only in terms of the degree of formality, the latter expresses "what language is being used for in the situation" (Gregory and Carroll, 1978:53), e.g., to encourage, to acquire, etc., Both uses of the term are encompasses by this discussion.

16. In that tenor pertains to the interpersonal -- an arena in which women and men are reputed to have such different levels of skill -- it is certainly ironic that it emerges as one of the central sex-differences in speech.

17. The study was conducted in Amsterdam.

18. A conclusion supported by one of the observations conducted by Crosby and Nyquist (1977). Because Brouwer, et al, observed only one male and one female ticket taker, they suggest either that male ticket takers are anamolous in Amsterdam or that the because the male ticket taker was new to the job, he demonstrated special attention to travelers and for that reason was met with a "female register."

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